



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

August 2015

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NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE

www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov





Wetland Restoration, Floyd County

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a **Message** from the **State Conservationist**



Rick Ellsmore
Acting State
Conservationist

Building Our Future Workforce

One of the highest priorities the agency faces is replacing its workforce. Years of experience and technical knowledge are lost when individuals decide to enjoy their retirement years. It is a serious challenge for

NRCS leaders, which is why I have asked the Iowa Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) to develop a recruitment strategy for replenishing our future workforce.

Lane Collins, ASTC-FO in Area 5 is leading this effort. The team's goal is to select up to 30 Pathways students who are in their freshmen, sophomore, and junior years in college. Team members will recruit at local university career fairs and in other parts of the

country. The Pathways program is an effective way to train, evaluate, and retain our future workforce. Students work in field offices during the summer months, learning how the agency works with private landowners to apply conservation practices on a voluntary basis. Once they graduate, NRCS can convert successful Pathways students to full-time employment status.

This is an exciting time to be involved in conservation activities. A recent poll of Americans by the Value of Water Coalition indicated that nearly 5 of every 6 adults support strategies and programs that develop sustainable water supplies. Having the best possible workforce will position NRCS and its conservation partners to best meet the needs of our private landowners.

I look forward to providing updates as this effort moves forward.

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov. Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



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RAGBRAI 2015: CYCLISTS GO BANANAS FOR CONSERVATION

By Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

For the 13th consecutive year a group of Iowa conservation partners – who call themselves the Iowa Conservation Team – handed out free bananas and mailed conservation themed postcards daily along The Des Moines Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI) route, July 19-24, 2015.

About 10,000 registered riders take on the week-long event, and thousands more unregistered local cyclists hop along for the ride. This year riders began the route in Sioux City and finished in Davenport.

The Iowa Conservation Team consists of the Iowa Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The project takes months to plan, starting when the RAGBRAI route is announced in January. Members of the group drive most of the route months ahead to find just the right location. "We are always looking for the perfect farmstead or acreage on the right side of the road," said Duane Miller, who represents the Iowa SWCS. "We seem to find friendly host families who appreciate what we're doing."

SWCS purchases around 80 cases of bananas for the six-day outreach project. Bananas are popular with cyclist because the potassium helps prevent cramping. The group goes through an average of 14 cases, or about 560 lbs., of bananas each day.

As more and more people communicate electronically, one might think postcards would be an outdated idea. However, this year riders sent 7,500 conservation postcards, a project record.

On Day 3 of the route, a celebrity guest, NRCS mascot Sammy Soil greeted cyclists and posed for pictures as they visited the stop. Sammy was promoting his new NRCS coloring book.



SWCS gave away 540 pounds of bananas each day.



Signage shows riders where the banana stops are located.



Riders sent 7,500 postcards to all 50 states and several foreign countries.

BACK IN THE DAY

1990's



Here's a group shot of a Capital Hill Workshop class containing some current and former Iowa NRCS employees. Thank you to Margaret Henderson, Area 4 AMA for the photo. How many can you identify? (Answers on page 11.)

NRCS AND SAMMY SOIL TALK CONSERVATION AT PRIDEFEST

By Jean Sandstrom, NRCS LGBT SEPM

Backyard conservation, soil health, and equal opportunity employment were our talking points at this year's PrideFest, an annual LGBT celebration in Des Moines, held June 14-15. NRCS sponsored a booth at the event as part of our outreach activities through the LGBT Special Emphasis Program (addressing historic discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons). Our special guest this year was Sammy Soil, who worked the crowds spreading the word about the importance of soil health – with a little assistance from Earth Team volunteers Nathan and Zoe Greiner.





Title: Soil Conservationist,
Lee/Van Buren Management Unit

College Education:

» B.A. in Agricultural Studies, Minor in Agronomy
Iowa State University, 2014

Younger Years: Nathan is from Olds, a small town in Southeast Iowa, where he attended WACO Community High School. He grew up on his family's row crop farming operation.

Conservation Career: Nathan's conservation background is rooted in implementing conservation practices on the family farm. He continued learning about them in college and through his most recent position as the Lower Skunk River Watershed Coordinator. Conservation is a family career choice. His mother has worked for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation as a secretary for the last 32 years. Growing up watching how NRCS helps conserve

the land by helping people help the land made it easy for him to choose the conservation career path.

NRCS Goals: Nathan plans on furthering his knowledge within NRCS to help promote conservation programs along with managing and insuring them.

In His Free Time: In Nathan's spare time he enjoys farming on the family farm with his Dad, playing and watching all kinds of sports and spending time with friends and family.



Nathan Shelman

CONSERVATION PAYS: HERE'S THE FACTS

Consider this: Just the soil fertility in a ton of soil has a value of **\$5 to \$10/ton**. Normal soil erosion loss of "T" (often considered at 5 ton/acre), has a nutrient value of **\$25 to \$50 an acre**. Without protection from no-till, terraces, cover crops and other conservation practices, many of Iowa's fields would experience soil erosion of 10 to 20 ton/acre (**about \$100/ac nutrient value lost**). Granted it's not direct cash income, but it is considerable value retained on the land.

Credit: Brian Lang, ISU Extension Agronomist, Iowa State University
Extension Information for Northeast Iowa



SPOTLIGHT VIDEO

The Science of Soil Health: Cycle, Re-cycle, Repeat

Carbon's journey through the soil powers life as we know it.

As global temperatures rise, there's growing interest in getting carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) out of the atmosphere and getting carbon into the soil.

But what form does that carbon take and how, exactly, does the cycling process work? Dr. Will Brinton provides a brief, yet holistic explanation about this living and life-giving process. After you watch this four-minute video, you'll never think of the soil carbon cycle the same way again. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3f1NNbi3JsY&feature=youtu.be>



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MYTH BUSTERS

HR
CORNER

Most of us experience varying degrees of stress every day: traffic, deadlines, and paying bills just to name a few.

Sometimes, stress can be harder to handle and affect you at home and at work. NRCS offers every employee free, confidential help through the [Employee Assistance Program](#).

EAP is as close as your phone. If you, or a family member living in your household, have a problem or concern, start with making a phone call (**1-888-243-5744**.) Sometimes, you can resolve an issue in a few minutes. Usually, you will make an appointment to meet for about an hour to assess your situation. A professional EAP counselor will work directly and confidentially with the employee or family member to help resolve the issue. In some cases, the EAP counselor's role will be to assist in determining what additional community resources can provide future assistance.

In choosing between short- or long-term counseling, the therapist will weigh the nature of the problem, as well as the client's desire and ability to work on resolving the problem. A decision is reached during the initial assessment as the counselor evaluates the client's treatment needs. Once completed, the assessment, with recommendations for treatment, are discussed with the client.

There is no charge for short-term counseling provided through The Sand Creek Group EAP counselors. If the problem is long-term, every effort will be made to give the client the names of qualified providers in the community (who are approved by insurance) and referred for treatment.

Employees may use EAP every year if necessary. It is an annual benefit available to every employee. To get help, call **1-888-243-5744**.

Soil Health: Partnership Field Days



The Soil Health Partnership (SHP) brings together diverse partner organizations including commodity groups, federal agencies, universities and environmental groups to work toward the common goal of improving soil health. Over a five-year period, the SHP will identify, test and measure farm management practices that improve soil health and benefit farmers. The Soil Health Partnership and its demonstration network farmers share ideas fueling the evolution of farming with other producers throughout the Midwest. The partnership will host soil health field days from August through the end of the year.

Four Soil Health Partnership field days have been held in Iowa so far, with three more scheduled for September.

- **9/1/2015** | Theo Bartman | ¼ mile south of the intersection of 270th Street and Fig Ave, Rock Valley, IA 51247
- **9/2/2015** | Marc Bertness and Dick Lund | Sioux Rapids, IA 50585
- **9/9/2015** | Tim Smith | 2634 Hancock Ave., Eagle Grove, IA 50533

Field Day topics include:

- Cover crop benefits and integration into local cropping systems;
- Nutrient management and other strategies to improve soil health;
- Hands-on soil demonstrations; and
- Farmer panels to discuss local experiences with cover crops.

For more, visit soilhealthpartnership.org.



Iowa Farmer Tim Smith.



FWP EVENT: INSPIRE, MOTIVATE, COMMUNICATE

More than 100 people attended the third annual Employee Development Event, sponsored by the Iowa NRCS Federal Women's Program. This year the event was held at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, and featured two top-notch speakers to address topics identified through employee input. Randy Dean addressed time-management tips during his presentation, "Optimizing Your Outlook: Time Management Tips & Tricks for Busy Outlook Users." (see article Page 9) Laurie Guest provided stress management strategies in her presentation "Life in the Espresso Lane - 7 Ways to Thrive in a Fast-paced World."

If you attended this year's event, the FWP committee would like to get your input. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation survey through the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LXBMWXM>.

TOP TEN: TIME-SAVING E-MAIL MANAGEMENT TIPS

Do you use your inbox as a to-do or task list? Do you create folders to file e-mails, or is your inbox out-of-control? Following are speaker Randy Dean's top ten tips for saving time and becoming more organized.

1. **Handle "Quick Little" E-mails Right Now.**

Handle "quick little" things when they come up the very first time you look at them. This keeps you from reviewing them multiple times before taking action.

2. **"Task" E-mails Take Longer.**

For those e-mails that will take longer than 3 minutes, figure out what the embedded task(s) is, and then add it to your task list.

3. **Don't Use Your E-mail Inbox as a "De Facto" Task List.**

If you are like most people, when you leave an e-mail in your inbox, it is because there is an action you still intend to take on that e-mail. It's better to define the task one time, and act on it when it reaches the top of your task list!

4. **Make Folders and Use Them.**

It is fine to keep your e-mails if you need them for retention and reference. Just don't keep them in your inbox.

5. **Don't Keep Attachments You Don't Need.**

6. **Make Your Sent E-mails "Task Oriented."**

For every e-mail sent, every recipient has a clear, defined task with a clear due date. This helps mitigate the overuse of those pesky "FYI/Just thought you'd want to know" e-mails that clog up far too many inboxes. Tell each recipient 1) why they got the e-mail, 2) what they need to know in the e-mail, 3) what they need to do in the e-mail (the task that needs to be done), and 4) when they need to get it done by.

7. **NEVER Send an E-mail With a Single Open Task to a Large Group.**

Human nature indicates NOBODY will, because no one truly owns the task. Better practice: make it VERY clear who owns an individual task in an e-mail if the e-mail is sent to a larger group, with VERY clear deadlines.

8. **Use Your "Signatures" Tool as an "Auto-emailer".**

Have you ever written an e-mail that you know you'll need to send again to another person again in the future? Take that e-mail text and make it an auto-signature option. Then, when that issue/option/topic comes up again, in just a couple seconds, you can drop that signature into a new e-mail, personalize it with the recipient's name, and send as if it were an original composition.

9. **Use SHIFT-DELETE for Junk and/or Spam Messages.**

Simply single-left-click on that message (don't double click it – that opens it!), hold down the SHIFT key, and hit Delete. When you do this, the e-mail you've selected bypasses your "Deleted Items" folder and is immediately permanently deleted.

10. **Whatever You Do, Don't "Bling"!**

Develop and follow a regimen that allows you to check your e-mail often enough to be "appropriately responsive", but yet not so much that you can't keep your focus and get your work done. Typically, for most professionals, that means 4-7 times per work day.

Credit: Randy Dean, www.randalldean.com

Additional time-management suggestions from Dean will be published in future issues of Current Developments.

The Modern Immigrant Experience: A Kenyan Perspective

By Judy Martinson, NRCS Training Officer



James Omune

James Omune, a recent immigrant from Kenya, and Kathryn Martinson, his fiancé, presented a Black Emphasis Program Lunch & Learn at the State Office in July - complete with Kenyan food prepared by the couple. James immigrated to the United States two years ago to complete his education as a physician assistant.

James talked about his family farm and quality of life in Kenya. Agriculture is an income source for 75% of the Kenyan population, and one of the largest exporters of produce to Europe. Most farmers in Kenya work without basic agricultural inputs, updated technology and lack adequate financial or extension services. He also shared there is no infrastructure for social programs in Kenya, so families rely on each other to provide food and homes during times of crisis.

Kathryn, the daughter of Iowa NRCS employee Judy Martinson, recently returned from a three-week visit to Kenya to meet her new family. She spoke to the group about the challenges faced by women in Kenya, particularly with no running water in the homes, limited or no electricity, and the making of meals

consuming a large part of daily activity.

As with James' family, women often face the challenge of providing the only source of income because Kenya has 40% unemployment rate.

James immigrated to the US after he was encouraged by friends to apply for the annual Diversity Visa Lottery. The program provides a maximum of 55,000 Diversity Visas each fiscal year to people from countries with low rates of immigration to the US. James quickly obtained employment and later joined the Army. Upon graduation from Boot Camp, he was granted American citizenship.

James and Kathryn live in Las Vegas.

WHERE IN THE WORLD: DO I FIX MY CONTACT INFO?



Is your name and/or contact information incorrect in the web-based USDA employee directory or other contact directories for NRCS? If so, here's a quick fix:

1. Go to <https://identitymanager.eems.usda.gov/iam/im/eems/>
2. Enter your eAuth to access this site
3. Click on the "Home" tab
4. Select "Modify my profile"
5. Enter your correct work phone and email, and scroll to the bottom to click "Submit"

This will fix what is displayed on the [USDA employee locator](#)

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

| NAME | TITLE | NATURE OF ACTION | EFFECTIVE DATE | LOCATION |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Mensing, Tony Joe | Agricultural Engineer | Resignation | 6/29/15 | Sioux City |
| Mar, Jay T. | State Conservationist | Retirement | 7/3/15 | Des Moines |
| Mullen, Thomas Malcolm | Soil Conservationist | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/12/15 | Marion |
| Frederiksen, Ross Thomas | Soil Conservation Tech | Promotion | 7/12/15 | Pocahontas |
| Mootz, Tricia A. | Human Resources Spec. | Transfer to different agency | 7/26/15 | Des Moines |
| McCauley, Jason C. | Biologist | Career Appt. | 2/22/15 | Sergeant Bluff |
| Bultman, James Allen | Soil Conservationist | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/26/15 | Chariton |
| Funk, Emily Jean | Soil Conservationist | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/26/15 | Garner |
| Hase, Anand Dean | Soil Conservationist | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/26/15 | Carroll |
| Shelman, Nathan Lee. | Soil Conservationist | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/26/15 | Keosauqua |
| Solheim, Kelsi Kim | Program Asst. | Career Cond. Appt. | 7/26/15 | West Union |
| McGrew, Monica Ann | Soil Conservationist | Promotion | 7/26/15 | Leon |
| Meggers, Dennis Joesph | Civil Eng. Tech. | Retirement | 8/1/15 | Manchester |
| Eberhart, Jana Lynn | Soil Conservation Tech. | Resignation | 8/7/15 | Maquoketa |



IN MEMORIAM

Dick Simmons, former NRCS technician in Lee, Scott and Jefferson counties passed away in July. He is Stan Simmons older brother. Services were August 1 at Lake Darling Lodge. Cards of sympathy can be sent to Mrs. Richard Simmons, 2394 145th Street, Fairfield, Iowa 52556.

Changes In IDALS-DSC PERSONNEL

| NAME | TITLE | NATURE OF ACTION | EFFECTIVE DATE | LOCATION |
|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Bro, Melody | Secretary | New Hire | 8/7/15 | Tama SWCD |
| Mullen, Tom | Conservation Technician | Left Employment | 7/10/15 | Jackson/Jones SWCD |
| Hase, Anand | Conservation Technician | Left Employment | 7/22/15 | Madison/Warren SWCD |
| Gray, Robert | Conservation Technician | Left Employment | 8/6/15 | Plymouth SWCD |



WHO'S WHO!

1. Former SRC Mark Berkland
2. Former Soil Scientist Mark LaVan
3. District Conservationist Luann Rolling
4. Former STC Leroy Brown
5. Former PAS Colleen Schneider
6. Former ARC (A4) Terry Cosby
7. Former ASTC-FO (A4) Jeff Zimprich
8. ASTC-P Larry Beeler

(Thank you Kim Broders!)